II. *On the Production of Ambergris. A Communication from the Committee of Council appointed for the Conſideration of all Matters relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations; with a prefatory Letter from* William Fawkener, *Eſq. to Sir* Joſeph Banks, *Bart. P. R. S.*

Read January 20, 1791.

TO SIR JOSEPH BANKS, BART.

Office of Committee of Privy Council for Trade, Whitehall, 15th January, 1791.

SIR,

LORD HAWKESBURY, Preſident of the Committee of Privy Council appointed for the Conſideration of all Matters relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations, having received a Letter from Mr. CHAMPION, a principal Merchant concerned in the Southern Whale Fiſhery, informing him, that a ſhip belonging to him had lately arrived from the ſaid fiſhery, which had brought home 362 ounces of ambergris, found by Mr. COFFIN, captain of the ſaid ſhip, in the body of a female ſpermaceti whale, taken on the Coaſt of Guinea; his Lordſhip thought fit to deſire Captain COFFIN, as well as Mr. CHAMPION, to attend the Lords of the Committee, that they might be examined concerning all the circumſtances of the fact before mentioned; and I am directed by their Lordſhips to tranſmit

to you a copy of the examination of theſe two gentlemen, that you may communicate the ſame to the Royal Society, if you ſhould think that any of the circumſtances, ſtated in this examination, will contribute to remove the doubts hitherto entertained concerning the natural hiſtory and production of this valuable drug. I ſend you alſo a piece of the ambergris ſo taken out of the whale, and ſome of the bills of the fiſh called Squids (which are ſuppoſed to be the food of ſpermaceti whales), and which were found partly in the ambergris taken from this female whale, and partly on the outſide of it, and adhering to it.

I have the honour to be, &c.

W. FAWKENER.

At the Council Chamber, Whitehall, the 12th January, 1791.

By the right honourable the Lords of the Committee of Council appointed for the Conſideration of all Matters relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations.

READ—Letter from Mr. ALEXANDER CHAMPION, a principal merchant concerned in the Southern Whale Fiſhery, to Lord HAWKESBURY, dated the 2d inſtant, acquainting his Lordſhip, that Captain JOSHUA COFFIN, of the ſhip The Lord Hawkeſbury, is lately arrived from the Southern Whale Fiſhery; and that the ſaid ſhip, beſides a cargo of 76 tons of ſpemaceti oil and head-matter, has brought home about 360 ounces

ounces of ambergris, which the ſaid captain took out of the body of a female ſpermaceti whale on the Coaſt of Guinea.

Meſſ. CHAMPION and COFFIN attending, were then called in, and the following queſtions were put to Mr. COFFIN, *viz.*

Q. Have any of the whales, taken before by ſhips ſailing from Great-Britain, to your knowledge, contained any ambergris?

A. None, that ever I heard of. The American ſhips have, at times, found ſome.

Q. Was the ambergris, found by you, in a bull or cow fiſh?

A. It was found in a cow fiſh.

Q. Is it uſual to look for ambergris in whales that are killed?

A. It has not hitherto been much the practice to do ſo.

Q. How happened it that you diſcovered this?

A. We ſaw it come out of the fundament of the whale; as we were cutting the blubber, a piece of it ſwam upon the ſurface of the ſea.

Q. In what part of the whale did you find the remainder?

A. Some more was in the ſame paſſage, and the reſt was contained in a bag a little below the paſſage, and communicating with it.

Q. Did the whale appear to be in health?

A. No; ſhe did not. She ſeemed ſickly, had no fleſh upon her bones, and was very old, as appears by the teeth, two of which I have. Though ſhe was about thirty-five feet long, ſhe did not produce above one ton and a half of oil. A fiſh of the ſame ſize, in good health, would have produced two tons and a half.

Q. Have you obſerved the food that whales generally feed upon?

A. The ſpermaceti whale feeds, as I believe, almoſt wholly upon a fiſh called Squids. I have often ſeen a whale, when dying, bring up a quantity of ſquid, ſometimes whole, and ſometimes pieces of it. The bills of the ſquid (ſome of which Mr. COFFIN produced) were found, ſome in the inſide, and ſome on the outſide of the ambergris, ſticking to it.

Q. Did you ever find any ambergris floating on the ſea?

A. I never did, but others frequently have.

Q. How long have you been engaged in the whale fiſhery?

A. It is about ſixteen years ſince I firſt entered into it.

Q. What is the general proportion of bull and cow whales you have met with?

A. I believe the proportion to be nearly equal. In my laſt voyage, however, I found only four bulls out of thirty-five whales. I fiſhed upon the Coaſt of Africa between five North and ſeven South degrees of Latitude. I am inclined to think, that the cow whale goes to calve in the low latitudes, which accounts for more cows being found in thoſe latitudes.

Q. Is there any particular ſeaſon when the cow whales calve?

A. I do not know that there is.

Q. Does the bull or cow whale, in proportion to their ſize, produce moſt oil?

A. The cow whale, when big with calf, produces more oil than a bull whale of the ſame ſize; when ſuckling, ſhe produces leſs.

Q. Are the whales uſually found ſingly, or in pairs? or in larger numbers?

A. Uſually in large numbers, which we call Scools, and particularly in the low latitudes. I have ſeen from fifteen to perhaps a thouſand together.

Q. Have you any further information on this ſubject to give the Committee?

A. We have generally obſerved, that the ſpermaceti whale, when ſtruck, voids her excrement; if ſhe does not, we conjecture that ſhe has ambergris in her. I think ambergris moſt likely to be found in a ſickly fiſh; for I conſider it to be the cauſe or the effect of ſome diſorder.

Queſtions put to Mr. CHAMPION.

Q. At what price does ambergris uſually ſell; and at what price did that, taken by your ſhip, ſell?

A. A ſmall quantity had lately ſold at 25*s. per* ounce; but it was then very ſcarce. Mine ſold for 19*s.* 9*d. per* ounce. The whole quantity, found in this whale, was 362 ounces Troy. The people who bought it told me, this was a larger quantity than was ever before brought at once to market. It has been generally ſold at about 4 or 5 pounds at a time.

Q. For the uſe of what country was this ambergris bought?

A. I do not exactly know. It was bought by a broker, who told me, that his principal, who purchaſed about one half, bought it for exportation to Turkey, Germany, and France. The other half was purchaſed by the druggiſts in town.